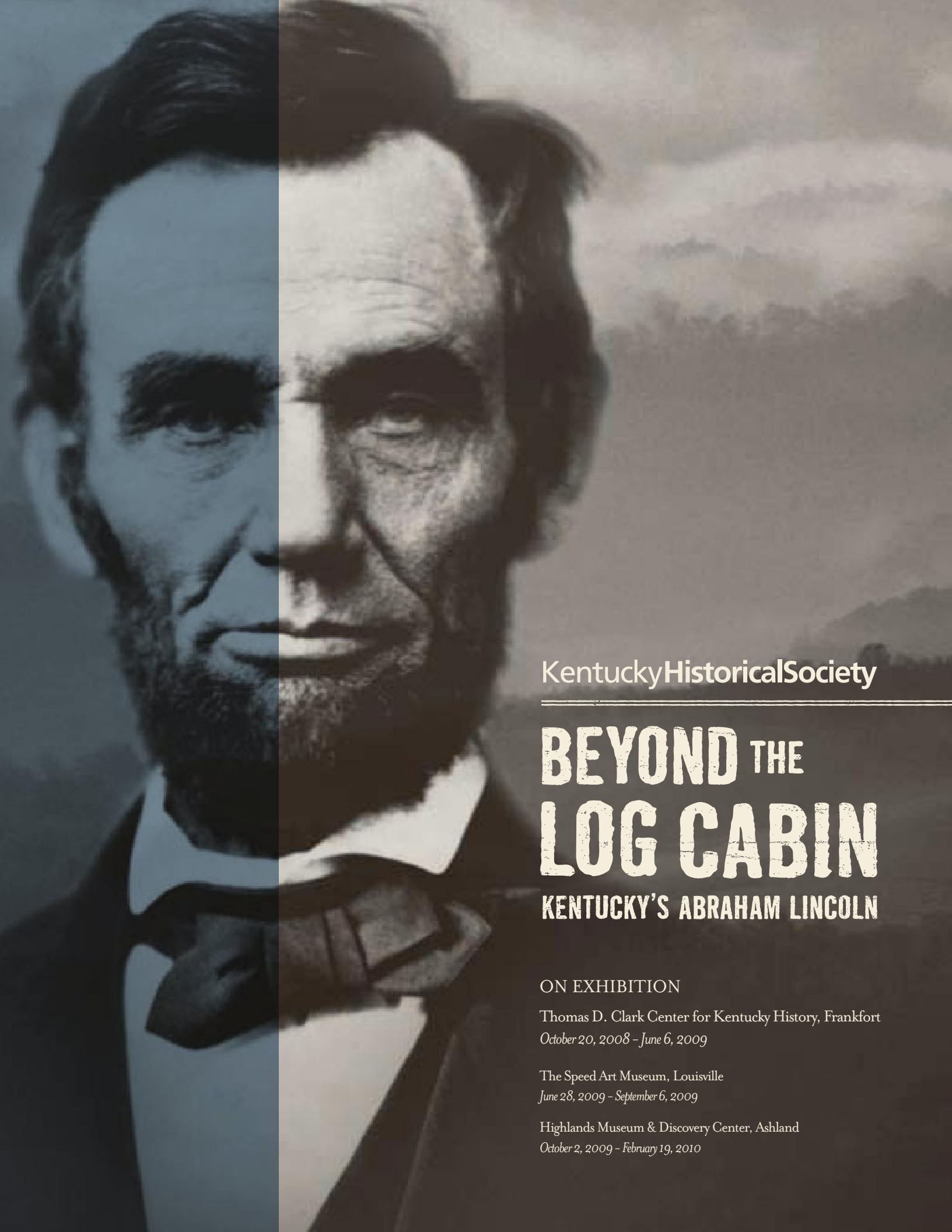


Kentucky Historical Society

BEYOND THE LOG CABIN

KENTUCKY'S ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ON EXHIBITION

Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History, Frankfort
October 20, 2008 – June 6, 2009

The Speed Art Museum, Louisville
June 28, 2009 – September 6, 2009

Highlands Museum & Discovery Center, Ashland
October 2, 2009 – February 19, 2010

Cover:
Images courtesy of Lee P. Thomas Photography, Inc. and the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

BEYOND THE LOG CABIN

KENTUCKY'S ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY R. DARRELL MEADOWS

As the subject of over 14,000 books in just over 140 years, Abraham Lincoln would top anyone's shortlist for the most-written-about person in history. And yet, despite numerous attempts to uncover the "real" Lincoln, he remains an elusive figure. When historian Merrill D. Peterson surveyed the vast cornucopia of Lincoln monuments, books, images, and popular songs, he found that most all of these representations boiled down to five essential stories, or "Lincoln myths." In our major traveling exhibition, *Beyond the Log Cabin: Kentucky's Abraham Lincoln*, we hope to "unpack" the dominant images of Lincoln the son of the frontier, Lincoln the self-made man, Lincoln the great statesman and savior of the Union, Lincoln the emancipator, and Lincoln the martyr. Each contains essential truths, yet none of them, on their own, tells the whole story. How Lincoln is remembered at any given time—and by whom—sheds as much light on the history of Kentucky and our nation as it does on Mr. Lincoln.

THE FRONTIER WORLD OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Frontier Kentucky and the Lincolns

By the time Abraham Lincoln was born in 1809, Anglo-American settlement of the Kentucky frontier had already proceeded for several decades. The Lincolns lived in a rapidly maturing agricultural and commercial society. Overland routes to Nashville and Louisville, and by extension New Orleans, connected seemingly isolated households in south-central Kentucky to the outside world. Locally, farmers and townspeople alike participated in a dense web of economic and social connections. Entirely typical of many households in this period, the Lincolns lived a rough-hewn, though not materially deprived, existence. Because of the difficulties of Kentucky land law, disease, and relatively high infant mortality, they faced many uncertainties. Overall, their experiences in Kentucky and their migration to Indiana in 1816 were far from extraordinary and in many ways exemplified the broad sweep of change that transformed the trans-Appalachian West in these years.

From Town to Country

Abraham Lincoln's father, Thomas Lincoln, was born in Virginia, the son of Revolutionary War veteran Abraham Lincoln and Bersheba Herring. In Kentucky, Thomas lived in Elizabethtown, where he was active in community and church affairs and worked as a carpenter. Money earned from these endeavors fueled his plans to become a farmer and landowner. By the early 1800s, Thomas ranked among the top twenty percent of taxpayers in Hardin County.

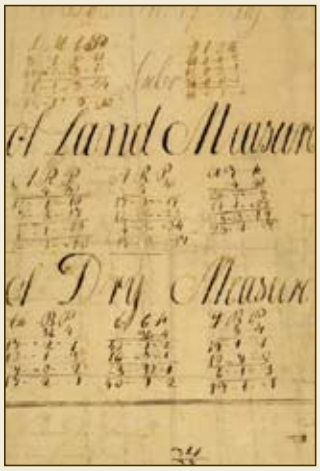
Originally called the Severn's Valley settlement, by the 1790s Elizabethtown served as a trade and service center for the surrounding countryside. It is there that Thomas Lincoln met his future wife, Nancy Hanks. The couple married in nearby Springfield in 1806, in the presence of Nancy's kinfolk. Little is known about Abraham's mother Nancy. Like her future husband, Thomas Lincoln, she was born in Virginia and came to Kentucky as a child. Nancy died of a common frontier disease known as "milk sickness" in 1818, after their removal to Indiana, when Abraham was nine years old. No images of Nancy are known to exist. In 1963, artist Lloyd Ostendorf made a "composite portrait" based on descriptions by people who knew her and photos of relatives.

In fall 1808, Thomas Lincoln moved his wife and one-year-old daughter Sarah to a 348-acre farm at the Sinking Spring near Hodgen's Mill. There Abraham was born the following winter. By 1811, the rightful ownership of the farm had come under question, and Thomas moved his family to thirty acres of "bottom

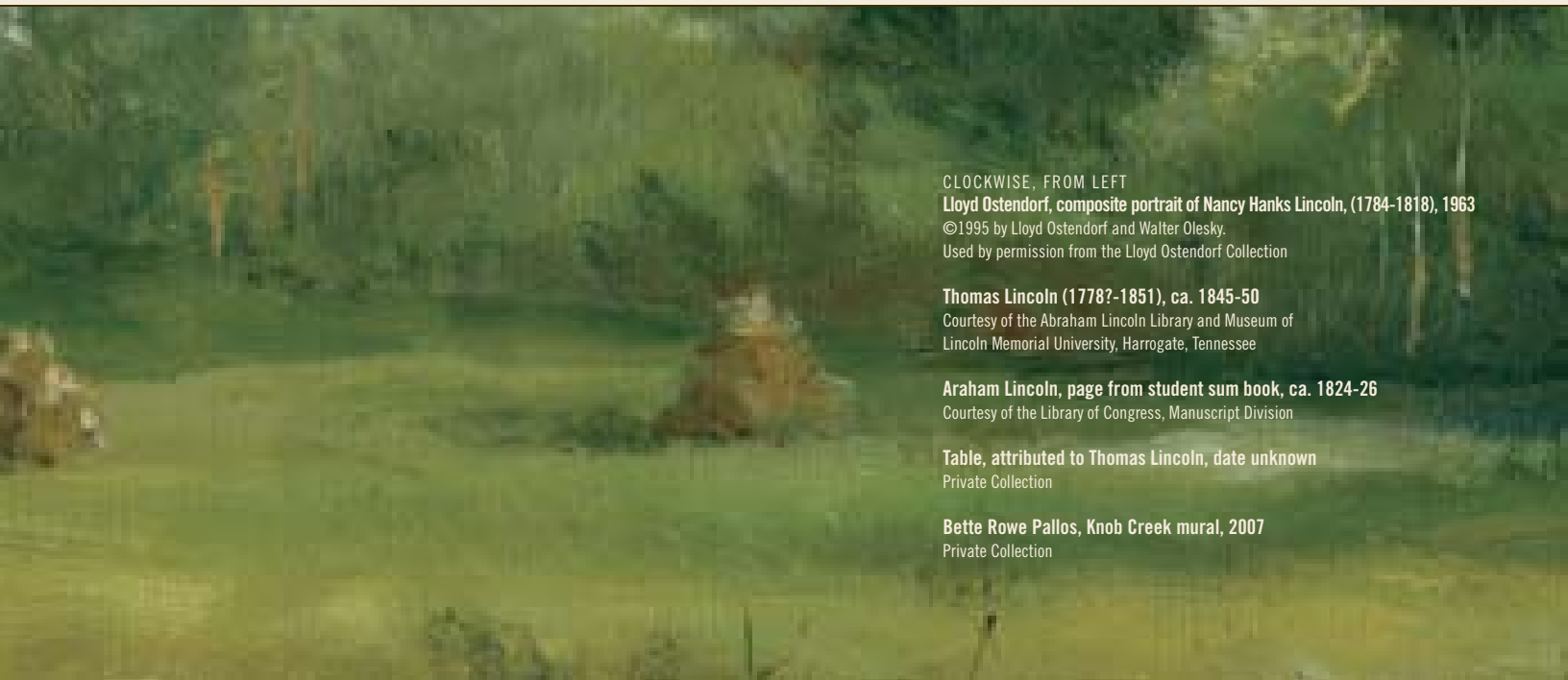
land" he leased at Knob Creek—the site of Lincoln's earliest childhood memories. At the "Knob Creek place," Lincoln later recalled, he lived in a log cabin, helped plant pumpkin seeds, and with his boyhood friend Austin Gollaher played and fished in the nearby stream. Unable to secure title to the Sinking Spring farm, Thomas decided in late fall 1816 to pull up stakes and try again in nearby Indiana, which had achieved statehood earlier that year. Unable to secure the prosperity he sought north of the Ohio, Thomas Lincoln's future never again appeared as promising as it had in 1808.

Frontier Education and Slavery

Children raised on the trans-Appalachian frontier rarely attended school. For brief periods in Kentucky and Indiana, Thomas Lincoln paid for Abraham and his sister Sarah to attend "blab" schools, where children learned through recitation. The bulk of Abe and Sarah's learning, as with most frontier children, came through reading, listening, telling stories, and playing. Lincoln's earliest-known writings are six large manuscript pages he penned at about age fifteen. On one of these pages, Lincoln solved math problems copied from Thomas Dilworth's *Schoolmaster's Assistant*.



The historical record may never yield the true meaning of Lincoln's observation, made in 1860, that his father chose to leave Kentucky "partly on account of slavery." We do know that during the years Thomas Lincoln sought title to the Sinking Spring farm (1808-16), more than one thousand enslaved African Americans resided in Hardin County, and slaves being sent overland to markets further south passed by the Lincoln's cabin on the Cumberland Pike. Throughout the Green River Valley (and increasingly across the Bluegrass), slave laborers were integral to the early development of Kentucky as they worked alongside homesteaders to transform forest to farmland. Many believe this tacit knowledge of slavery in Lincoln's childhood years must have stuck with him all his life—though we have no record of his actual experience of slavery from these years.



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT

Lloyd Ostendorf, composite portrait of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, (1784-1818), 1963
©1995 by Lloyd Ostendorf and Walter Olesky.
Used by permission from the Lloyd Ostendorf Collection

Thomas Lincoln (1778?-1851), ca. 1845-50
Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum of Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee

Araham Lincoln, page from student sum book, ca. 1824-26
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division

Table, attributed to Thomas Lincoln, date unknown
Private Collection

Bette Rowe Pallos, Knob Creek mural, 2007
Private Collection

The LEXINGTON WORLD of YOUNG MARY ANN TODD

ARISTOCRATIC EDUCATION AND URBAN SLAVERY

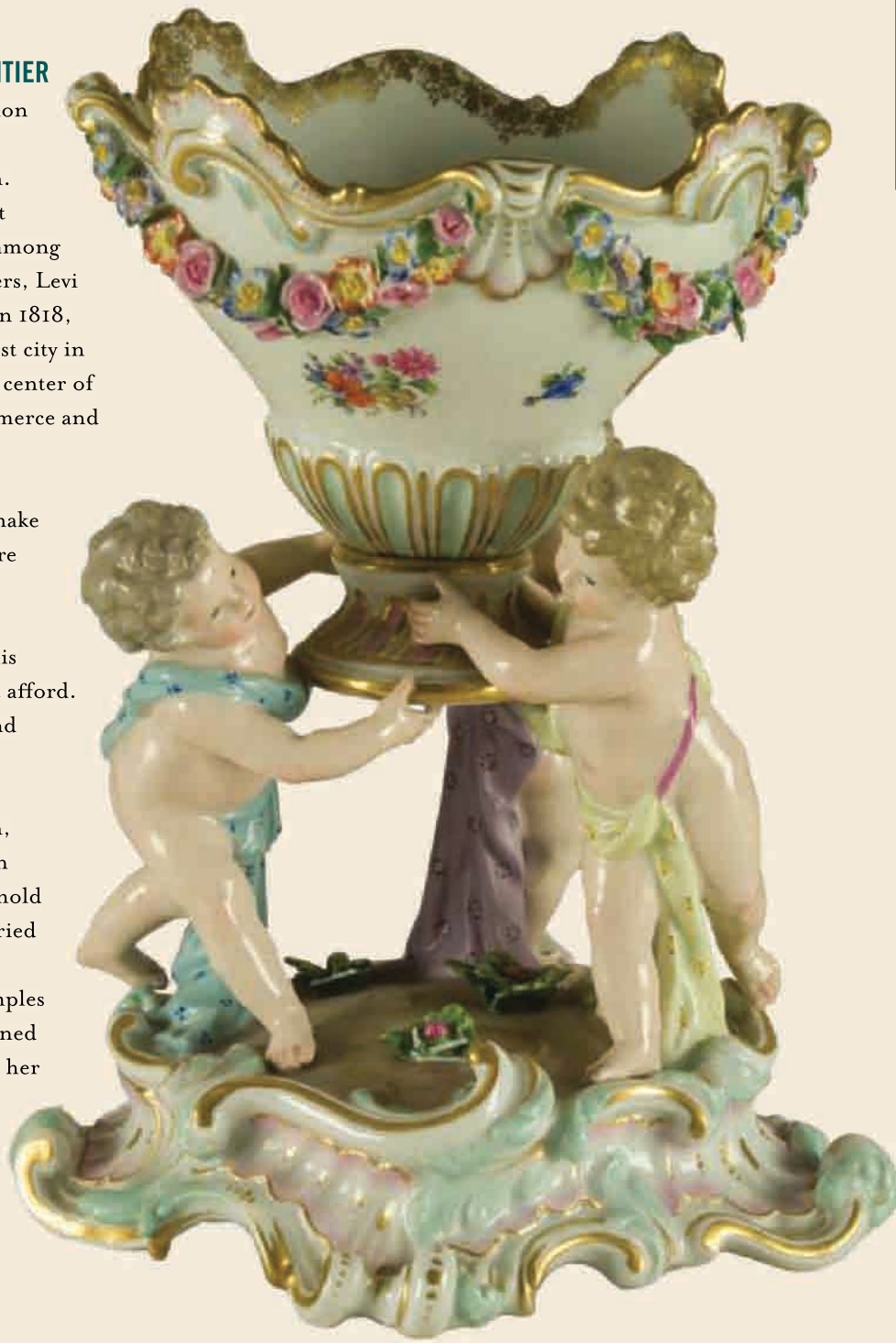
Mary Todd's family valued education. Her mother, Eliza, had briefly attended Beck's Lexington Female Academy, while Robert Todd attended and later supported Transylvania University. They, in turn, provided each of their daughters with a well-rounded education. Mary attended exclusive boarding schools for nine years and then worked with a tutor for another year. At Ward's and Mentelle's schools, Mary obtained a solid education in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, natural science, and religion. By her eighteenth birthday, Mary was one of the best-educated women of the entire antebellum period.

FOUNDING FAMILY AND KENTUCKY'S URBAN FRONTIER

Located at the center of overland trade and migration routes leading west and south, the Kentucky Bluegrass could not have existed without Lexington. Likewise, Lexington would not have existed without the entrepreneurial spirit of its founding fathers, among whom figured both of Mary Ann Todd's grandfathers, Levi Todd and Robert Parker. By the time of her birth in 1818, Lexington had emerged as the leading and wealthiest city in Kentucky. Some called it the Athens of the West—a center of learning and culture built on a foundation of commerce and manufacturing.

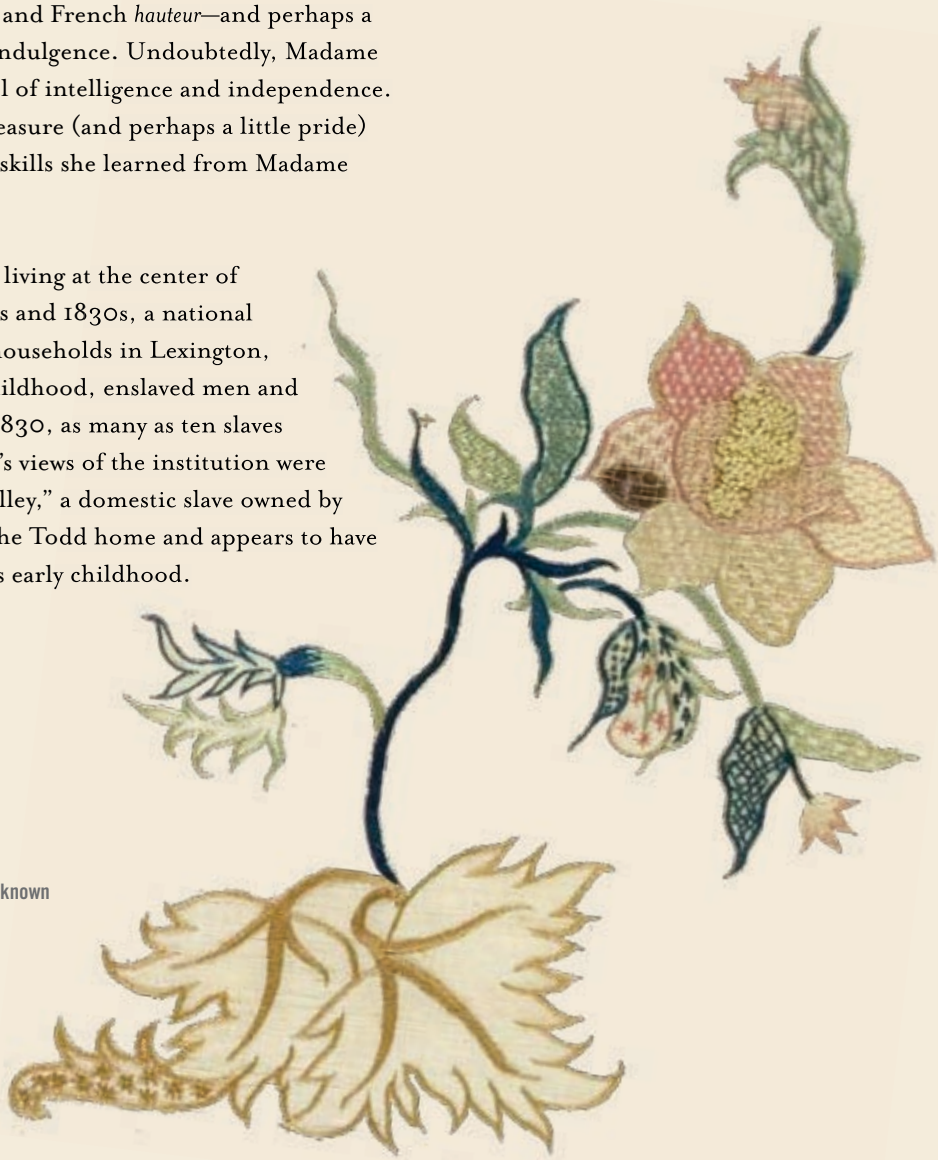
If Abraham Lincoln's father had no choice but to make his own way in the world, Robert S. Todd, his future father-in-law, inherited a legacy. As a community leader and wealthy businessman, and eventually a notable Kentucky politician, Todd could provide his children with opportunities most fathers could not afford. This inheritance shaped Mary's future prospects and helped form her keen interest in politics.

As the matriarch of a founding family of Lexington, Elizabeth Porter Parker ("Grandma Parker") was an imposing figure who in 1810 oversaw a large household of twelve, including six slaves, plus that of her married daughter, Eliza. Reflective of her English-styled aristocratic tastes, Parker sought out exquisite examples of artisanal craft, such as an engraved spoon fashioned by one of the best silversmiths in Lexington. When her mother died in 1825 at the age of thirty-one, Mary was just seven years old. In the following years, Widow Parker, as her grandmother came to be known, was the most important female figure in Mary's life.



From the slightly eccentric Charlotte Mentelle, Mary also received a lifelong fluency in French and French *hauteur*—and perhaps a bit of understanding and indulgence. Undoubtedly, Madame Mentelle served as a model of intelligence and independence. As an adult, Mary took pleasure (and perhaps a little pride) in her embroidery, using skills she learned from Madame Mentelle.

The Todds were slaveholders living at the center of what would become, by the 1820s and 1830s, a national hub of the internal slave trade. Like half of all households in Lexington, the Todd family employed slave labor. In her childhood, enslaved men and women served Mary at home and at school. By 1830, as many as ten slaves worked in the Todd household, and Mary Todd's views of the institution were indelibly shaped by their presence. "Mammy Salley," a domestic slave owned by Mary's Grandma Parker, frequently worked in the Todd home and appears to have been the most constant adult presence in Mary's early childhood.



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT

Asa Blanchard, silver spoon, date unknown
Courtesy of the Mary Todd Lincoln House

***View of Lexington, Kentucky*, detail, ca. 1855**
Collections of The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky

Miniature of Charlotte Victorie (Leclerc) Mentelle (d. 1860), date unknown
Courtesy of the Mary Todd Lincoln House

Mary Todd Lincoln, silk embroidery, ca. 1865
Courtesy of Hildene, the Lincoln Family Home

Meissen porcelain compote, date unknown
Courtesy of the Mary Todd Lincoln House

LINCOLN'S RISE

LINCOLN'S STORY, AMERICA'S STORY

No other individual in American history has come to embody the American dream so completely as Abraham Lincoln. Why this should be so is an interesting question—for his story was far from unique in nineteenth-century America. As a child, Lincoln was born into a world in which ninety percent of households lived in log cabins. Like his own family, thousands of others felt the push and pull of migration north of the Ohio River. As a young politician in the Illinois legislature, Lincoln rubbed shoulders with numerous Kentuckians, and his embrace of Whig politics and Henry Clay's American System mirrored thousands of his generation. In the example of Lincoln's self-conscious effort to achieve respectability at home, at work, and in politics, we see the emergence of the American middle class.

THE INVISIBLE HAND OF MIGRATION

We also see a world shaped by the flood of trans-Appalachian migrants who, like the Lincolns, passed through Kentucky into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois (as well as Tennessee). This invisible but no less powerful influence of migration would shape Lincoln's choice of occupation and his prospects for marriage. Serving briefly in the Black Hawk War in 1832, Lincoln met a number of young men who, like himself, had been born in Kentucky. One of these, a young lawyer named John Todd Stuart, encouraged Lincoln to study law, and in 1837, he made Lincoln a partner in his Springfield firm. Upon arrival in Springfield, Lincoln met another native Kentuckian, Joshua Fry Speed, with whom he formed a lifelong friendship.

Both Stuart and Speed were members of the Springfield "clique," a social circle that included some of the most prominent politicians in Illinois. They frequently met at the home of Stuart's cousin, Elizabeth Todd Edwards, and her husband, Ninian Edwards, son of the former Illinois territorial governor. It was in the Edwards' Springfield mansion, several years later, that Stuart introduced Lincoln to yet another cousin of his—Elizabeth's sister, Mary Ann Todd.

A POLITICAL PARTNERSHIP

Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln were married on November 4, 1842. As a young bride, Mary was both vivacious and refined. Still, some members of the Todd family thought Lincoln "mighty rough" and did not approve of the match. But Mary's choice reflected the growing trend to marry for love and compatibility rather than wealth or family interests. Mary and Abraham proved intellectually compatible, sharing a deep affection for books, especially poetry, and an immense political ambition. Early on their marriage showed itself to be both a loving and a political partnership.

Mary's most important contribution to her husband's political career may have been her supreme confidence in his ability. But her practical engagement was also considerable, especially during Lincoln's rise to national prominence in the 1850s (after which Mary played a much-diminished role). In spring 1849, with Lincoln's term in Congress ended, she embarked on a letter-writing campaign to help secure the coveted position of commissioner of the General Land Office, signing "A. Lincoln" to over forty letters addressed to friends and associates closely connected to President Zachary Taylor. In fall 1854, when Lincoln decided to give up his seat in the Illinois state legislature in order to pursue one in the U.S. Senate, newspapers described it as "a family decision." During the U.S. Senate race of 1858 against Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln found himself inordinately busy, traveling some 4,200 miles and giving no less than sixty-three speeches between August 12 and October 30. Back in Springfield, Mary worked diligently, reviewing editorials and interpreting his moderate

antislavery views in personal letters to inquiring friends and associates. But perhaps the most fitting testament to their political partnership occurred when Lincoln learned of his election to the presidency on November 6, 1860. Lincoln immediately left the telegraph office and headed for home. As he approached the corner of Eighth and Jackson, Lincoln called out: "Mary, Mary, we are elected!"

RISING POLITICALLY

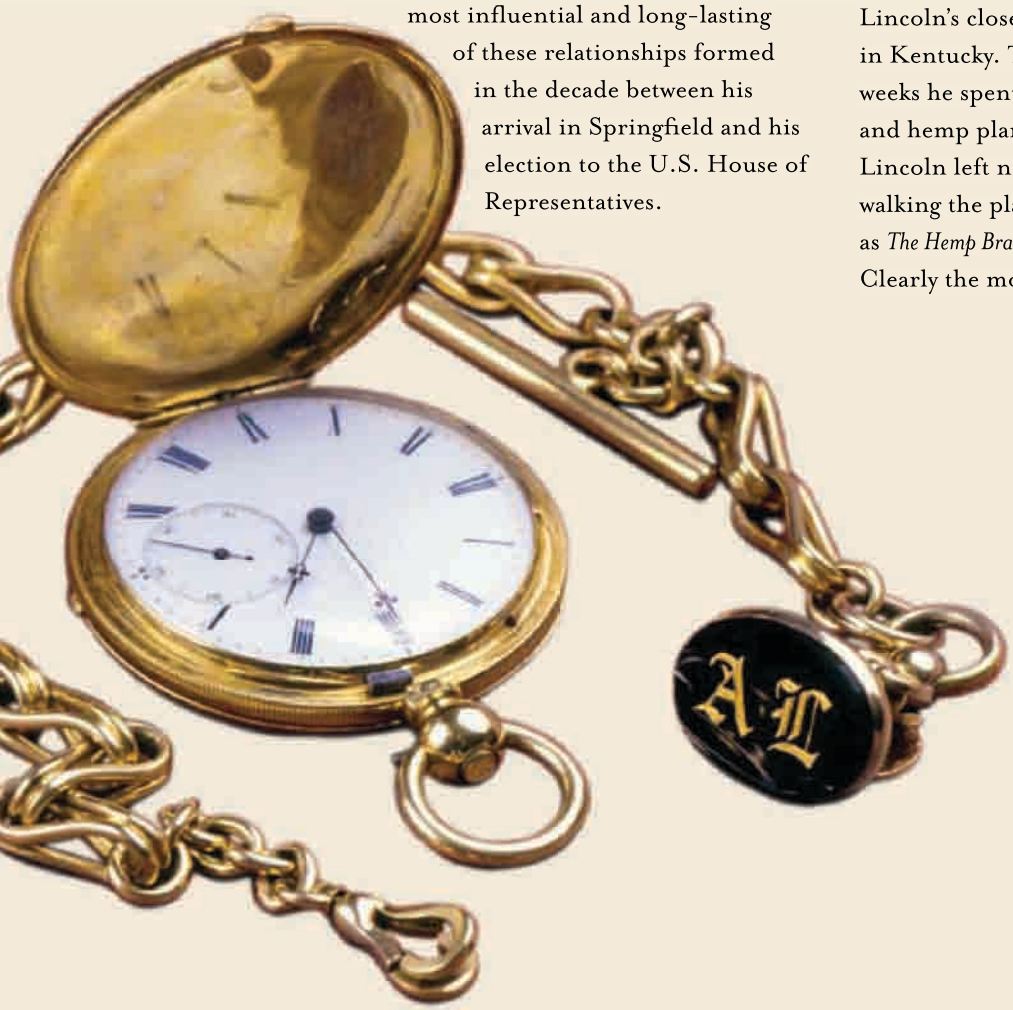
When Mary and Abraham married in 1842, Lincoln had five solid years of experience working with two of the best lawyers in Illinois, John Todd Stuart and Stephen T. Logan, had already argued important cases before the Illinois Supreme Court, and had just completed his fourth and last term in the Illinois state legislature. As a leader of the Illinois Whig Party, Lincoln was an expert stump speaker, whose humor and storytelling were as perceptive as his language and probing logic were precise. Wherever he went, he engaged people with a combination of gregariousness, wit, fair-mindedness, and probity, whether on the political or judicial circuit, and these qualities undoubtedly account for his ever-expanding personal network of friends and associates. The most influential and long-lasting of these relationships formed in the decade between his arrival in Springfield and his election to the U.S. House of Representatives.

TOWARDS ANTISLAVERY

In Congress, Lincoln would support legislation prohibiting slavery from the territories acquired during the recent war with Mexico and would consider proposing compensated, gradual emancipation in the District of Columbia. This public support for antislavery measures was a new, if tentative, departure for Lincoln, and likely stemmed as much from his personal relations with Kentuckians residing in Illinois as with the rise of the Free-Soil movement. Because so many of his early associations in Illinois – including, most prominently, those with the Todd family – involved slaveholding Kentuckians or relatives of slaveholders, it is reasonable to believe that these individuals must have influenced Lincoln's decidedly gradualist antislavery views, which he professed as early as 1837. But we have no records, for example, documenting conversations that likely took place between Abraham and Mary on the subject of slavery—though she too appears to have held conservative antislavery views. Nonetheless, Abraham Lincoln's thinking about the problem of slavery in the United States appears to have undergone a maturing process sometime in the 1840s, which coincides with Lincoln's growing familiarity with his native state.

Aside from two trips to New Orleans in his twenties, Lincoln's closest, if rare, observations of slavery occurred in Kentucky. The most extensive of these were the three weeks he spent at Farmington, the Speeds' Louisville home and hemp plantation worked by dozens of slaves. Although Lincoln left no written record of what he may have observed walking the plantation grounds, contemporary paintings such as *The Hemp Brake* (ca.1840) suggest a range of possibilities. Clearly the moral question of slavery hung over him, for on

continued on next page



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT

Teapot from the Lincolns' tea service, ca. 1850-55
Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum of Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee

Katherine Helm, portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln, ca. 1928
Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum of Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee

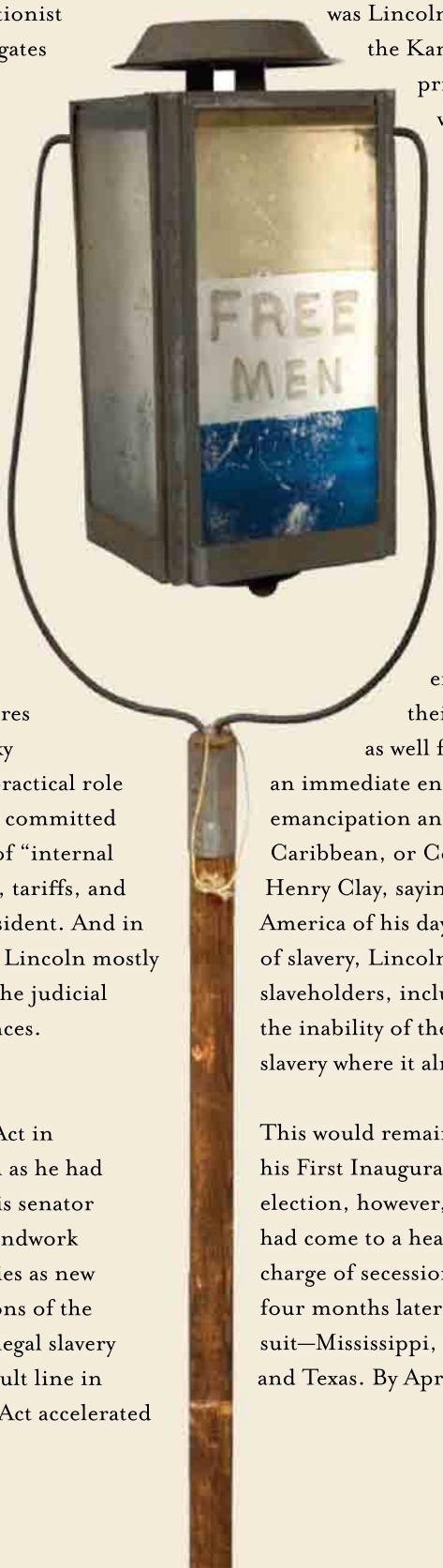
Pocket watch owned by Abraham Lincoln, ca. 1860
Collections of the Kentucky Historical Society

Lincoln and Hamlin flag, ca. 1860
Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum of Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee

George Peter Alexander Healy, *Joshua and Fanny Speed,* 1864
Courtesy of The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky

his boat trip back to Springfield, he wrote of the dozen slaves on board, severed from their families and chained together for sale further south. This same scene would appear again, fourteen years later, in a letter to Joshua Speed.

We also know that after his return from Congress in spring 1849, Lincoln gave particular attention to Kentucky politics, where supporters of gradual emancipation – including James Speed, Cassius Clay, and the abolitionist John G. Fee – were campaigning for delegates to the upcoming Kentucky constitutional convention, where they hoped to add an antislavery amendment. When the death of Mary's father, Robert S. Todd, provoked litigation over the estate, Lincoln timed his family's visit to Lexington in late-October to coincide with the convention. With the emancipationists unable to secure a single delegate, proslavery politicians defended and strengthened Kentucky's slave provisions—including a declaration on the inviolability of slave property. Here, Lincoln witnessed firsthand how strongly even nonslaveholders would fight to secure the future of slavery.



Despite his support for antislavery measures in Congress and his attention to Kentucky politics, the issue of slavery played little practical role in Lincoln's political career thus far. As a committed Whig, Lincoln had pushed the platform of "internal improvements" (roads, canals, railroads), tariffs, and a national bank, as he would again as president. And in the years after his return from Congress, Lincoln mostly concentrated on his law practice, riding the judicial circuit, and improving his personal finances.

ANTISLAVERY POLITICIAN

But the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, as Lincoln later said, "aroused him as he had never been before." Introduced by Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas, the act laid the groundwork for the organization of these two territories as new states and, while overturning key provisions of the 1850 Compromise, opened vast areas to legal slavery by popular referendum. Cutting a new fault line in American politics, the Kansas-Nebraska Act accelerated the disintegration of the Whig Party and the realignment of the two-party system. In Illinois, Lincoln would become a key player in the politics of antislavery provoked by the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

The moderate antislavery position Lincoln staked out in his famous speech at Peoria, Illinois, on October 16, 1854, would remain largely unchanged until his presidency. This was Lincoln's first major public statement against the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its underlying principle of "popular sovereignty," which would authorize voters in each of the territories to decide whether to permit or exclude slavery. Citing the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, which had excluded slavery from the territories, Lincoln argued forcefully that the Founding Fathers had placed slavery on the path to ultimate extinction and that the Kansas-Nebraska Act overturned this principle in favor of a moral indifference to the extension of slavery. Hoping to build a bridge of support among both conservative and antislavery Whigs as well as "free soil" Democrats in Illinois, Lincoln did not blame southerners for slavery or for not knowing how best to end it. "They are just what we would be in their situation," he said. Distancing himself as well from northern abolitionists who sought an immediate end to slavery, Lincoln advocated gradual emancipation and colonization of free blacks to Africa, the Caribbean, or Central America, as did his political hero, Henry Clay, saying that black equality was impossible in the America of his day. Finally, while stressing the moral wrong of slavery, Lincoln acknowledged the constitutional rights of slaveholders, including the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the inability of the Federal government to interfere with slavery where it already existed.

This would remain Lincoln's position when he delivered his First Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861. With his election, however, the sectional crisis in the United States had come to a head, with South Carolina leading the charge of secession. By the time of Lincoln's inauguration four months later, six other southern states had followed suit—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. By April, the nation was at war.

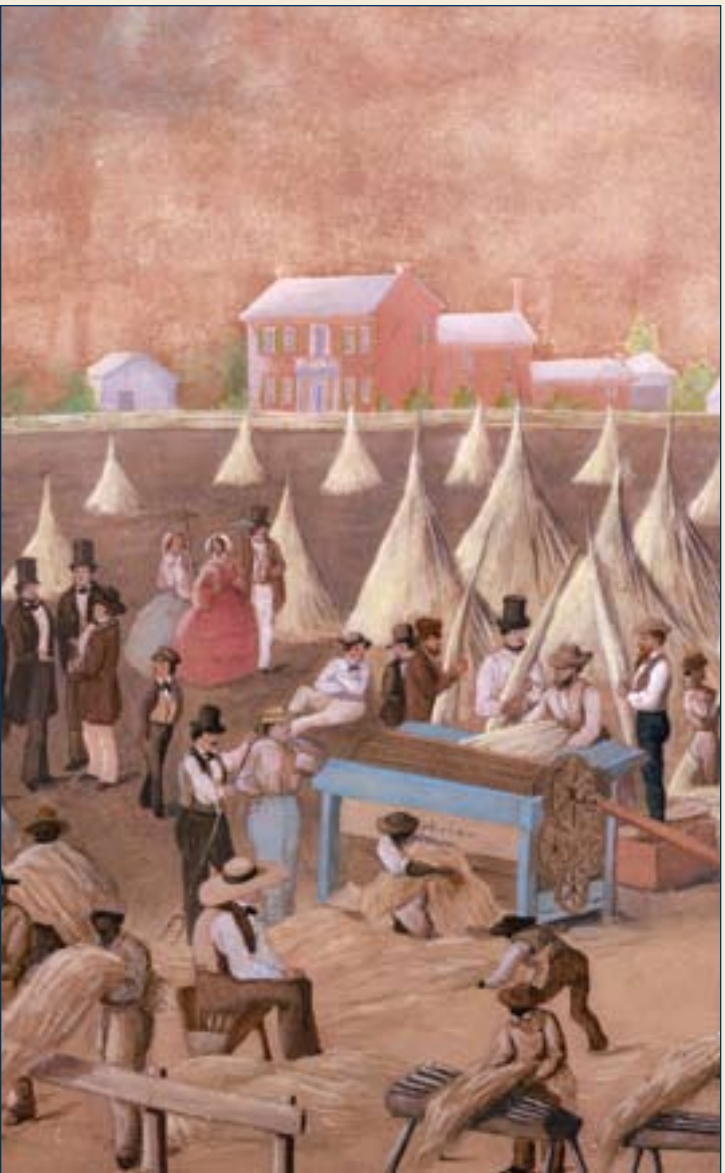
LINCOLN AND KENTUCKY AT WAR

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT:
"Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men" campaign lantern, ca. 1858-60
Courtesy of the National Park Service, Lincoln Home National Historic Site

***Louisville Public Advertiser*, August 19, 1826**
Courtesy of University of Kentucky Libraries

Bugle used by John Washington Payne, Second Kentucky Regiment, Confederate States of America
Collections of the Kentucky Historical Society

***The Hemp Brake*, attributed to Samuel I.M. Major, ca.1850**
Collections of the Kentucky Historical Society



KENTUCKY'S CIVIL WAR

Kentucky voters overwhelmingly rejected Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860. Yet their rejection of Lincoln was not a rejection of the Union. In fact, some two-thirds of Kentucky voters chose Union candidates John Bell and Stephen A. Douglas. This pro-Unionism was consistent with the Whig political tradition in Kentucky. But Kentucky was also a slave state, and the vote against Lincoln reflected a strident anti-Republican fear that Lincoln would interfere with the institution of slavery. When civil war broke out in April, Kentuckians sought to avoid becoming a battlefield and initially opted for armed neutrality. But the room for neutrality soon disappeared and by fall the majority of Kentuckians had sided with the Union. With a small but vigorous Confederate minority, Kentucky soon became what all hoped to avoid—a civil war within the Civil War.

Between 25,000 and 40,000 Kentuckians wore Confederate gray uniforms, while some 90,000 to 100,000, including 25,000 black soldiers, served in Federal blue. But as recent studies have discovered, Kentucky's Civil War, as with much of the Upper South and West, was also shaped profoundly by guerrilla warfare. In perhaps no other aspect of this period do we see how divided Kentuckians were all across the state, including the eastern Appalachian region. Opposed even by Confederate president Jefferson Davis and members of the Confederate Congress, guerrilla warfare was very much a local affair. From the earliest stages of the war, local bands of Confederate, and to a lesser degree, Union, guerrillas

often operated outside of any larger command structure, pitting neighbor against neighbor and posing a difficult challenge for both local and Federal authorities.

FEDERAL POLICY IN KENTUCKY

Through summer 1862, Lincoln had insisted that his commanders take a conciliatory approach toward southern civilians, including strict nonintervention with southern slavery. But as the war deepened and guerrilla warfare expanded, Congressional leaders, northern civilians, and Union troops urged Lincoln toward harsher treatment of secessionists and pushed slave emancipation and confiscation of Confederate property. Continued Border State intransigence toward Lincoln's repeated offers of voluntary, compensated gradual emancipation emboldened his steps in this direction.

In large areas of Kentucky, John Hunt Morgan's Confederate raids of 1862-64, which often employed civilians as informants and participants, catalyzed the growth of local guerrilla bands led by local men with local support. To suppress these bands, as well as other activities deemed acts of treason, on July 31, 1862, Brigadier General Jeremiah T. Boyle assumed responsibility for the establishment of Federal military government in Kentucky. Unable to stem this tide, by summer 1864, Confederate guerrillas were active throughout the state. It was in this context that Lincoln imposed martial law and suspended habeas corpus in Kentucky and Union commander Stephen G. Burbridge implemented his harsh "counter-insurgency" campaign. Throughout the war, the crisscrossing of armies and the constant presence of guerrilla "irregulars" weighed heavily on the civilian population. But Union actions in Kentucky, though ultimately successful, and the president's tardy response to charges of military misrule also left a legacy of bitterness toward Lincoln's administration.

EMANCIPATION AND BLACK RECRUITMENT IN KENTUCKY

In 1860, Kentucky held over 225,000 slaves, more than Maryland and Missouri combined, and had more slaveholders than any other state except Virginia and Georgia. Conflicts over slave policy thus shaped the Civil War in Kentucky as much as they drove national policy. From the outset, Kentucky regiments generally adhered to Lincoln's conciliatory policy of noninterference with slavery, while officers and soldiers of Midwestern regiments–the vast majority of Union regiments serving in Kentucky–were more apt to defy it. By April 1862, radicals in Congress, who that month abolished slavery in the District of Columbia, increasingly voiced their opposition to Lincoln's appeasement of the Border States. Even as Lincoln moved toward military emancipation in summer and fall 1862 and extended black recruitment to all of the other Border States during 1863, strong proslavery resistance in Kentucky forced Lincoln to tread cautiously for most of the war.

In late September 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and in December announced his plan to enlist African Americans into the Federal army. Both measures signaled a major shift in war aims. Out of military necessity, Lincoln now intended to harness the manpower of former slaves and a general attack on southern slavery to the larger end of saving the Union. Both measures provoked a firestorm in Kentucky. Although the proclamation did not apply to Kentucky slaves, slaveholders feared slave insurrection, while many of the enslaved believed it signaled their impending freedom. Over the next year, Lincoln felt the relentless backlash from Kentucky – from its congressional delegation, through his network of Kentucky informants, in newspaper editorials, in reports of the Kentucky legislature – and postponed black recruitment there until Congress forced his hand in early 1864.

The U.S. Conscription Act of February 24, 1864, included recruitment of "all able-bodied colored persons" of military age "resident in the United States." In Kentucky, the measure faced bitter opposition, despite the assurance of compensation to loyal slaveholders. In Lexington on March 10, Colonel Frank L. Wolford called black soldiers "an insult and degradation" and denounced the policy as "unconstitutional and unjust," provoking counter-speeches by Unconditional Unionists Robert J. Breckinridge and Green Clay Smith. Governor Thomas E. Bramlette drafted a proclamation advising the people of Kentucky to forcibly

resist black recruitments, but he relented after a March 15 meeting with Breckinridge and several other staunch Unionists. The revised proclamation, published the next day in the *Frankfort Commonwealth*, recommended compliance, thereby avoiding open conflict between federal and state authorities. By mid-April, the congressional demand for 10,000 Kentucky recruits had failed by half, and Burbridge issued his General Orders No. 34, extending recruitment to free blacks and slaves, with the owner's authorization.

Many slaveholders responded with violence toward slaves seeking to enlist, but Kentucky slaves proved determined to enlist and secure their freedom. By June, over Bramlette's repeated protests, Burbridge had removed all restrictions on African American recruitment, and Kentucky tobacco farmers soon faced a major labor shortage. Resistance to black recruitment by armed guerrillas appeared in many districts, especially southern and western Kentucky, provoking Lincoln to impose martial law in Kentucky. By fall, some 5,400 slaves had enlisted at Camp Nelson alone. Thousands of others fled the state to enlist in Ohio, Tennessee, and to a lesser degree, Illinois. By summer 1865, nearly half of all eligible African American men in Kentucky–about 25,000–had enlisted in the Union army.

The social and economic impact of this de facto end of slavery in Kentucky and the bitterness engendered on all sides of the conflict would linger for decades, and greatly shape how Kentuckians would remember Abraham Lincoln ever after.

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT

"War in Kentucky . . . portions of the town burnt by the rebels,"
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 15, 1862
Courtesy of the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University

"Freedom to the Slave," recruitment poster, ca. 1863-64
Courtesy of the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University

Sword, presented March 10, 1864, to Colonel Frank L. Wolford, First Kentucky Cavalry, date unknown
Collections of the Kentucky Historical Society

U.S. M1855 cartridge box
Collections of the Kentucky Historical Society

Remembering
LINCOLN
Then and Now

THE CONTEXT OF LINCOLN MEMORY IN KENTUCKY

An understanding of how Lincoln has been remembered in Kentucky since his assassination in April 1865 cannot be divorced from the difficult relationship of Lincoln to Kentucky, beginning with his election as president. In 1864, Kentuckians again rejected Lincoln, preferring the Democratic candidate, George B. McClellan, by a ratio of 2.3 to 1. But Lincoln's national victory helped to ensure that Unconditional Unionists like Robert J. Breckinridge would remain an important force in Kentucky politics through the early postwar years.

Despite their occasionally vociferous anti-administration criticisms, such men had counted among Lincoln's staunchest supporters, and over thirty Kentucky Unionists attended Lincoln's funeral in Springfield on May 5, 1865. Just two weeks earlier in Louisville, Governor Thomas E. Bramlette, despite his recent criticisms, urged Kentuckians to accept the "revolution" that had lately swept over Kentucky. Lincoln's ultimate aim, he reminded his audience, had been to preserve "the institutions of our country—to preserve all that is worth preserving and that could possibly be preserved from the wreck of this revolution." Through the 1866 state elections, Unconditional Unionists (who, like Bramlette, urged Kentuckians to accept emancipation as a fait accompli) would continue to struggle, though unsuccessfully, for ratification of Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution. With the return of ex-Confederate politicians to the Democratic Party, members of which considered the Thirteenth Amendment unconstitutional, Kentucky Democrats reunited into a cohesive bloc, able to push state's rights and to voice opposition to Congressional Reconstruction.

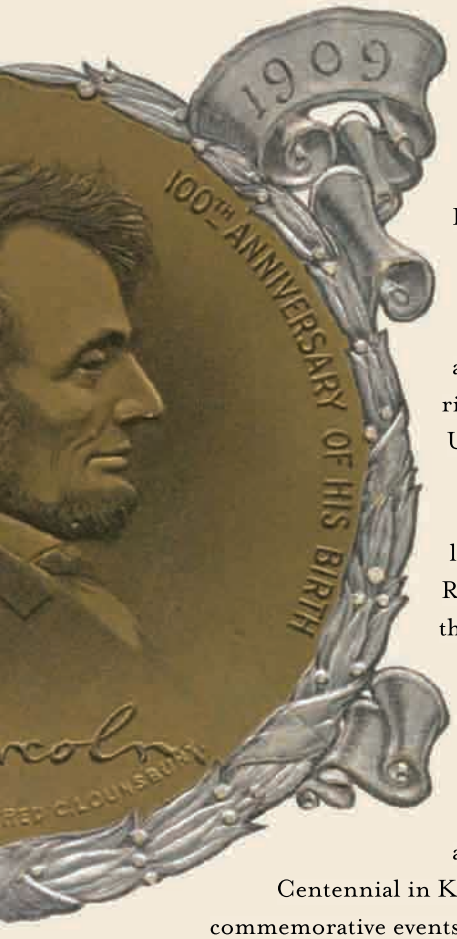
In the wake of such enormous challenges and significant anti-administration and anti-Congressional sentiment, white Kentuckians began to embrace a pro-Confederate public culture as early as 1866-67. In the following decades, enthusiasm among white Kentuckians for the memory of Abraham Lincoln (or the Union) receded from public view. In other ways, the development of a pro-Confederate identity in Kentucky was a by-product of the social and economic dislocations engendered by the war. For example, exploiting the economic potential of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad became crucial, since Louisville had lost ground to Cincinnati's growing east-west trade. Thus, some of the first promoters of Confederate public culture were local businessmen and politicians in Louisville, who mounted a major marketing campaign to gain new southern markets and attract southern businessmen to their city. Later, organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy added a public dimension to this pro-Confederate cultural movement through the building of Confederate monuments in counties across the state and, more profoundly, through the insertion of pro-Confederate narratives in textbooks.

KENTUCKY'S LINCOLN CENTENNIAL

Despite the Confederate public culture of Kentucky, the state was a major site of commemorative activities honoring the one-hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth. In 1909, Kentuckians and other visitors to the state joined President Theodore Roosevelt at the "Lincoln Memorial Farm" for a ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the new memorial in Hodgenville. The following May, Kentucky notables, including guest of honor Emilie Todd Helm, again gathered in Hodgenville to unveil one of the two Lincoln sculptures that Adolph A. Weinman would produce for the state. The other, a gift of the Speed family, would be placed in the rotunda of the new state capitol in Frankfort and dedicated in November 1911. And in February 1911, President

William Howard Taft was on hand for the dedication of the completed Birthplace Memorial.

At all of these events, images of Lincoln the Great Emancipator contrasted uneasily with the more dominant images of Lincoln the great statesman and frontier American—a reflection of the difficult transition from slavery to freedom in Kentucky and the recent adoption of Jim Crow segregation. The remarks of President Roosevelt at the Lincoln Memorial Farm on February 12, 1909, were indicative of this moment in American history and the tendency to extol Lincoln's role in saving the Union while downplaying the issue of slavery. Drawing attention first to Lincoln's frontier origins, the president called Lincoln "This rail splitter, this boy who passed his ungainly youth in the dire poverty of the poorest of the frontier folk" and marveled at the dramatic rise of this unlikely savior of the Union: "After long years of iron effort, and of failure that came more often than victory, he at last rose to the leadership of the Republic, at the moment when that leadership had become the stupendous world-task of the time."



But the image of Lincoln the Emancipator was not absent from the 1909 Lincoln Centennial in Kentucky. In the less-public commemorative events sponsored by members of the African American community, the Emancipator took center stage. On February 13, 1909, for example, an audience of several hundred African Americans held an event in honor of Lincoln at the Odd Fellows Hall in Frankfort. The most powerful of the three speakers that night was Dr. Edward E. Underwood, a member of the Negro Peoples' Centenary Committee. Offering due praise for Lincoln's frontier origins and the effect of Kentucky soil and air on the would-be president, Underwood turned to the larger significance of Lincoln's actions for former slaves. If, like Roosevelt, Underwood stretched the "real" Lincoln story just enough to make his point, he differed in his strident defense of

Lincoln the Emancipator: "And so it was that when Abraham Lincoln saw four million of his fellow creatures in subjugation and chains he felt that it was but an act of mercy to strike the shackles from their limbs and bestow upon them the deathless boon of freedom." The name of Abraham Lincoln, Underwood observed, "shines out with imperishable luster," his memory among African Americans was "holy ground."

DISCOVERING KENTUCKY'S LINCOLN AT THE BICENTENNIAL

Today, Kentucky and the nation little resemble what they were in 1909. Funding appropriated by the state legislature places the Kentucky commemoration among the largest in the nation. In 2009, Kentucky chose this bicentennial moment to revisit its own past while exploring the life and accomplishments of its native son, Abraham Lincoln. In examining this past, we continue to pay tribute to Lincoln's frontier origins and his remarkable rise from log house to White House. But unlike 1909, we are better positioned to understand our sometimes-difficult past and recognize that, in ending slavery, our nation took an important step toward forming a more perfect Union. Exploring the complex relationship between Abraham Lincoln and his native state of Kentucky can deepen our understanding of this extraordinary, yet ordinary, man and the state that reluctantly came to embrace him. In revisiting the life and character of Abraham Lincoln, we find a source of inspiration for our collective future.

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT:
***The Apotheosis*, ca. 1865**
Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum of Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee

Lincoln Centennial Souvenir Program detail, February 12, 1909
Collections of the Kentucky Historical Society

Ed Hamilton, *Slavery*, photographic print of clay model, 2007
Private Collection

Elsie at the Lincoln Birthplace Memorial, 2007
Private Collection

Kentucky Historical Society

BEYOND THE LOG CABIN

KENTUCKY'S ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This exhibition is made possible by

James Graham Brown Foundation

1809–2009 Kentucky abraham LINCOLN Bicentennial

Kentucky Historical Society Foundation

www.history.ky.gov

Kentucky Unbridled Spirit

The Kentucky Historical Society is an agency of the Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet.